

Guest commentary

State needs to do more to address highway noise concerns

By David Folts

After reading reports of the last Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway Citizens Advisory Team Meeting (SMCAT) on Jan. 5th, I feel compelled to write this letter.

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), HDR Engineering and the Federal Highway Administration are going over some basic information on land use, noise and hazardous materials site reports that will make up the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for some or all of the proposed South Mountain Freeway.

SMCAT members were told that every attempt would be made to mitigate highway noise, with rubberized asphalt offering the best noise reduction. I would agree with this statement if the vast majority of traffic was automobiles, but this highway will possibly carry more commercial traffic than any other highway in the state, and as Arizona grows the possibility exists of having the heaviest commercial traffic in the country. I am also leery of ADOT stating values of noise reduction with rubberized asphalt only because it could lead to very short walls, if any, at certain points along this highway. After all, ADOT only needs to meet noise criteria, not visual aesthetics.

Because of the nature of this proposed commer-

cial bypass, I feel the highest walls in Arizona should be along this highway or maybe depress the highway. Of course, ADOT stated hundreds more homes would be needed for this to happen minus any engineering data for proof of this statement. Honestly, only a fully depressed highway makes any sense traveling through such a densely populated residential area. This would achieve the highest level of noise mitigation and quite possibly have the least negative effects on our community. ADOT did state that homes quite a distance from the noise mitigation walls could receive more noise than homes directly adjacent to the walls. I have read of this phenomenon with the author referring to the process as the cathedral effect with noise carrying up to one third of a mile inland from the edge of the highway. In some instances homeowners replaced windows in their homes alleviating any interior nuisance.

Toward the end of the SMCAT meeting I pressed a senior ADOT official about what a homeowner could do if noise levels were above lawful limits, and how long it would take to remedy this situation. After getting generic and indirect answers, I continued to press for a clear answer, which I finally received. "We (ADOT) will make an attempt to mitigate highway noise issues, but only if it is feasible." There is a real possibility that many people will have noise issues from this highway and there will not be

any way to reduce it.

In closing I would like to bring up a few points:

- Proposed South Mountain Loop 202 will serve as a commercial bypass for the city of Phoenix.
- Quite a bit of proposed South Mountain Freeway will be above grade as an elevated highway.
- With the growth rate Arizona is experiencing, highway noise levels could increase two or three times from the values when the highway was built.
- South Mountain Freeway will most likely be classified as a hazardous cargo route since it avoids higher population areas in the city center.
- In a recent poll conducted by a local publication, 55.7 percent of the respondents stated they would never use this highway and 26 percent said they would only use this route occasionally.

We as residents of Ahwatukee need to get involved now, before it is too late.

Ahwatukee Foothills resident David Folts founded the Concerned Families Along South Mountain Loop 202 group. He may be reached at southmntnloop202@yahoo.com.